

## PERSPECTIVE

## Opportunity May Be Knocking: A New Paradigm for Defense Department Installation Environmental Management

David C. Guzewich, CEP  
Patrick A. Timm

It's no secret that US Department of Defense installation management is undergoing dramatic change. Over the next 5 years, the Department is expected to privatize much of its current utility infrastructure. Additionally, it's possible that significant installation management functions could be transitioned to the private sector under commercial activity studies (A-76) or other processes. Additional Base Realignment and Closure actions, requested by the Department, would add to the trend by offering more of the Department's infrastructure to the private sector. While these changes will undoubtedly create a certain amount of uncertainty in the environmental community, they will also provide the Department an opportunity to increase efficiency and lower support costs while still providing sound environmental stewardship.

The Defense Department has an excellent environmental program and by almost any measure the Department's environmental compliance posture is significantly improved. Major strides have been made to improve stewardship of the natural and cultural resources on Defense Department installations, ensuring both their protection for future generations and continued military training. The Department has also made significant progress in incorporating environmental concerns in the development and acquisition of new weapon systems and equipment and in reducing the number and amount of hazardous materials used in operations and processes. The Department is however, always seeking to find a more efficient and proactive way to manage environmental activities and mini-

mize the impact of military operations on the environment.

Today, the most promising environmental management trend is the adoption of a "true" environmental management system (EMS). Such a system is rapidly becoming the preferred method of managing environmental programs both internationally and in the US. The most recognized approach is the International Standards Organization (ISO) standards commonly known as ISO 14000 EMS. An outgrowth of highly successful quality management principles, ISO 14000 EMS is a management system based upon a set of recognized standards. It provides a management tool enabling organizations of any size or type to control the impact of its activities, products, or services on the environment. It utilizes a structured approach to setting environmental objectives and targets, monitoring the progress of objectives, and demonstrating they have been achieved. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took ISO 14000 EMS one step further for federal facilities by developing a program called the Code of Environmental Management Principles. This is a collection of five broad principles and underlying performance objectives providing a basis for Federal agencies to move toward more responsible environmental management. Adherence to these principles helps ensure environmental performance that is proactive, flexible, cost effective, integrated and sustainable. These programs are more than just current industry "buzzwords" and could offer the best solution for improved environmental management in the future.

The increased reliance on the private sector also offers the Defense Department the opportunity for sustained (if not improved) environmental performance at the lowest possible cost. These opportunities would be maximized if selected private sector firms were already ISO certified and environmental management system procedures were integrated into their operations. The growing acceptance of the ISO 14000 standard as the recognized environmental management system provides the best mechanism to ensure that installation con-

tractors possess the necessary capabilities to effectively manage Defense Department facilities.

The Department should actively explore the potential for adopting the ISO 14000 standards for all installation management contracts and for environmental management at all levels. Pilot studies at several Defense Department installations are currently underway. At the same time, the Department should work with the EPA and other federal and state regulatory agencies to develop a new approach to installation environmental management. Such an approach that would rely more on ensuring true implementation of environmental management systems and less on enforcement actions to achieve improved environmental performance.

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*Address correspondence to David C. Guzewich, Chief, Environmental Quality Division, US Army Environmental Center, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010; (fax) 410-436-4714; (e-mail) David.Guzewich@aec.apgea.army.mil or Patrick A. Timm, Project Manager, J. M. Waller Associates, Inc., Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010; (e-mail) Patrick.Timm@aec.apgea.army.mil*